



News Release

For Immediate Release:

Monday, July 9, 2007

Media Contact:

Mike Friedrichs

Chronic Disease Epidemiologist

801-538-6244

Good Things in Small Packages

First-ever Health Behavior Survey Data Now Available by Neighborhood

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Would you like to know how physically active your neighbors are? Or whether your town has more cases of diabetes than others? Just check the Utah Department of Health's (UDOH) new Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) report. The report summarizes the results of a comprehensive phone survey of more than 22,000 Utahns across the state. While the data were previously reported by Utah's 12 local health districts, the new BRFSS results are further divided into dozens of "small areas."

"'Small areas' refers to a set of 61 geographic areas in Utah with relatively small population sizes, approximately 20,000 to 60,000 persons," said Michael Friedrichs, UDOH Chronic Disease Epidemiologist. "These geographic areas are especially useful for doing public health assessment in communities within Utah's urban counties," he added.

All small areas are contained within a health district and, when possible, conform to cities and towns. The land area of the small areas varies greatly, with the smallest area consisting of a few square miles in Salt Lake County and the largest small area encompassing the three counties that make up the TriCounty Health District.

The BRFSS is the largest telephone health survey in the world. It is the primary source for state and national estimates on a variety of 'behavioral risk factors,' such as current cigarette smoking, physical activity, binge drinking and nutrition. Measures of health status, including the percentages of adults who have been diagnosed with diabetes, asthma or arthritis, are also part of the survey.

- MORE

Page 2 of 2 - First-ever Health Behavior Survey Data Now Available by Neighborhood

Personal behaviors play a major role in health. Because the BRFSS survey data are used to develop and monitor local public health efforts like smoking cessation and physical fitness programs, it is important to know how behaviors vary from neighborhood to neighborhood. Then, health departments can custom-design interventions where they are needed most.

For example, the Utah County Health Department (UCHD) used small area data to identify neighborhoods with higher smoking rates. While just one percent of survey respondents in the Provo/BYU area reported being smokers, that number jumped to 12 percent in Springville/Spanish Fork.

“We partnered with BYU students to gauge support for tobacco policies in Spanish Fork parks and to raise awareness of the risk of tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure among Spanish Fork youth,” said UCHD Health Promotion Director Eric Edwards. “As a result, the city’s Parks and Recreation department adopted a new policy that prohibits all tobacco use in baseball dugouts, on playing fields, or any time during coaching,” he added.

The BRFSS report was developed by public health program staff at UDOH, under the direction of Utah’s BRFSS Coordinator, and with the assistance of members of the Utah Local Association of Community Health Education Specialists (ULACHES). ULACHES members are specialists who use BRFSS data to understand the health education needs of the communities they serve and then develop programs to improve community health.

The data are presented in tables, graphs and maps to help show differences across the state. It includes maps of each health district and its small areas to help the reader visualize the exact size and location of the small areas. To see a full copy of the report, visit <http://health.utah.gov/opha/publications/brfss/SA2001-2005/SA2001-2005.html>.

#

The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.